

Frameworks and phases: An overview of the transdisciplinary research process

To unpack the process of TDR projects, it is helpful to structure the dynamic, interactive, and sometimes messy process into phases with associated main tasks and key questions to consider. Frameworks with 3 phases are widely used and described, typically illustrated with diagrams and tables illustrating these steps. Various authors have proposed similar models with slight variations, emphasizing the importance of collaboration, diverse perspectives, and integration of knowledge throughout the process. For simplicity, we propose to use the 3 phases described as follows:

- Collaborative problem framing (co-design)
- Analyzing the problem and co-producing new knowledge (co-production)
- Integrating knowledge for application and assessment of outcomes (co-implementation)

Key motivations for engagement in each phase include the diverse expertise and perspectives participants bring to the table, aiming to collectively frame the problem, conduct analyses, and develop workable solutions. Design principles and guiding questions are often provided to support each phase of the process, with case studies used to demonstrate their application. In addition, there is a need for long-term engagement and iteration in TDR efforts, as solutions may require revision over time due to the complexity of the issues and rapid changes in the world.

Collaboration, knowledge co-production, and TDR are closely linked, with collaboration being a key assumption and requirement for TDR. Terms such as co-creation, co-production, and co-design are often used interchangeably and are seen as essential components of TDR. To work collaboratively on a TDR project requires fostering reflexivity, addressing power dynamics, and valuing the TDR process and outcomes. Frameworks may also emphasize that co-production extends beyond knowledge generation to include capacity building, social learning, and implementation of actions contributing to sustainability.

Overall, available conceptual framings of the process highlight the iterative nature of TDR, the importance of collaboration and diverse perspectives, and the need for continuous reflection and adaptation throughout the research process.

- Is almost always context dependent, but generally also strives to achieve outcomes that can be generalized to other contexts.

Further reading:

- Buser, Tobias. 2024. [Partnering for Change: Link Research to Societal Challenges](#). Network for Transdisciplinary Research, td-net of the Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences.
- Studer, Sibylle, Paulsen, Theres. 2023. [Co-producing knowledge: Phases, issues, and the td-net toolbox](#). Integration and Implementation Insights. October 10, 2023.
- [Sample Dashboards](#). ITD Toolkits Inventory. International Transdisciplinary Alliance Toolkit Inventory Working Group Project.